

Disease-Modifying Therapy in MS

Treatment with a disease-modifying therapy (DMT) is the best-known strategy for managing MS. It may delay or prevent progression of MS and minimize future disability caused by further inflammation and damage to nerve cells, which can sometimes occur without any noticeable symptoms.

The goals of treatment with a DMT are:

- Decreasing the frequency and severity of MS relapses (also called exacerbations or attacks).
- Reducing the accumulation of new damage in the central nervous system (CNS) as shown on magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).
- Slowing the accumulation of disability.

Many medications have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for treatment of relapsing forms of MS, to include clinically isolated syndrome, relapsing-remitting disease, and active secondary progressive disease.

Different mechanisms of action

DMTs differ in how they work. Discuss treatment options with a healthcare provider and decide which MS medication is right for you. If the medication does not work adequately or the side effects are not manageable, you can probably switch to a medication with a different mode of action and side effect profile and do better.

Different routes and schedules of delivery

DMTs also differ in how they are delivered - orally as pills or capsules by mouth, liquids by injection, or intravenously (in a vein) by infusion - and how often you need to take them. Most pills or capsules are taken once or twice a day, while injections are usually taken less often, and infusions even less often, as rarely as twice a year. In addition to considering the medication's mechanism of action, work with a healthcare provider to determine which delivery route and schedule is best for you.

Different side effects and risks

Each of the DMTs has its own set of potential side effects and long-term risks. Side effects may include injection site reactions, infusion reactions, infections, alterations in liver function, other autoimmune conditions, cardiac problems, as well as other risks. In general, the more powerful the medication, the greater the associated risks. Your personal goals and tolerance for risk matter. Work with your healthcare provider to make the most appropriate medication choice.

Disease-modifying therapies in pregnancy and breastfeeding

Pregnancy: Most medications that are used to treat MS symptoms are not safe to use during

pregnancy. Work with your MS healthcare provider to determine if, when, and how you should stop any medications you are taking if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant.

Breastfeeding: Treatment with corticosteroids for an MS relapse is safe postpartum but they will pass into breastmilk. The DMTs and some symptom management medications are not recommended during breastfeeding because it is not known if they pass into breastmilk. Work with your MS healthcare provider and maternity care provider to determine which medications are safe for you and your baby.